



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Southeast Utah Group
Arches and Canyonlands National Parks
Hovenweep and Natural Bridges National Monuments
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Moab, Utah 84532-3298

1.A.2 (SEUG-RSS)

September 29, 2014

Memorandum

To: Files, Southeast Utah Group

From: Superintendent, Southeast Utah Group

Subject: Determination regarding the prohibition of climbing, scrambling, walking upon, and rappelling from arches in Arches and Canyonlands National Parks

The purpose of this memo is to document my assessment and determination regarding the need for prohibiting visitor use activities on arches in Arches and Canyonlands National Parks.

Arches and Canyonlands National Parks both were established to preserve and protect spectacular geologic features and associated scenic values for the inspiration of current and future generations. Notable among these features are numerous rock arches, which have formed and continue to change through natural processes of weathering, erosion, fracturing, and collapse. Since January 1995 with the completion of the Canyonlands Backcountry Management Plan, technical rock climbing¹ has been prohibited on any arch or natural bridge named on a U.S. Geological Survey 1:62,500 scale topographic map of Canyonlands National Park, with the exception of Washer Woman Arch. Likewise, technical climbing on named arches in Arches National Park was prohibited in the 1990's. Technical climbing on unnamed arches has not been prohibited, and other activities on named or unnamed arches also have not been prohibited, including climbing arches without use of climbing equipment, scrambling on arches, walking on arches, and engaging in similar activities. Through increasing levels of park visitation, in recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the occurrence of various visitor activities on arches. In accordance with National Park Service (NPS) policy, park managers are required to periodically assess ongoing recreational activities and ensure that they do not negatively affect park resources or values, interfere with other visitors' enjoyment of the park, or create a hazardous condition for park visitors or staff.

By law and policy, NPS is required to maintain and restore the integrity of park natural and cultural resources and associated values. Iconic scenic views, and opportunities for visitors to experience and enjoy the inspirational qualities of these scenic views, are among the most significant resources and values associated with Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. Some park visitors have chosen to experience these features in part by climbing, scrambling, walking, and engaging in other recreational activities on the arches themselves. The increasing levels of park visitation, the rapid rise in the use of hand-held devices for capturing and distributing digital imagery, and because arches are features that inherently attract visitor attention, the frequency and types of visitor activities on arches has grown. As a result, there have been increasing adverse impacts on the quality of the scenic views seen by other visitors, as well as on the nature of other visitors' overall experience of these superlative settings and their potential to inspire.

¹ Technical rock climbing is defined as ascending or descending a rock formation using rock climbing equipment.

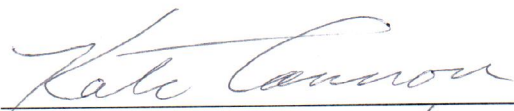
In addition to impacting other visitors' experiences, the presence of people on an arch also represents an unnatural condition for the feature itself. Arches develop, change, and eventually collapse as a result of natural geologic processes involving the progressive weathering and disintegration of rock. The particular details of these processes, as well as their sensitivity to acceleration by human activities, are dependent on many site-specific factors. But weight and vibration attributable to people (individually and cumulatively over long periods of time) on a feature have the potential to add to natural stresses and result in permanent damage that may unnaturally accelerate geologic processes, with implications for the stability of the feature and the safety of park visitors.

Increasing occurrence of visitor activities on arches certainly heightens concerns about visitor safety. Due to the nature of most arches (i.e., narrow and elevated), activities upon them inherently involve a high degree of risk. It is neither possible nor NPS policy to eliminate all dangers. But it is NPS policy to manage risks in a manner that prevents visitor injuries while preserving natural and cultural resources and ensuring that visitors have the opportunity to experience and enjoy those resources.

Determination

In accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 1.5, and the requirements of NPS *Management Policies 2006* Sections 1.5 and 8.2, it is my professional judgment that it is necessary to prohibit climbing, scrambling, or walking upon, wrapping webbing or rope around, or rappelling from any arch with an opening greater than 3 feet in Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, except for Washer Woman Arch in the Island in the Sky District of Canyonlands. This prohibition is necessary to prevent unacceptable impacts to scenic values, minimize visitor-use conflicts, protect geologic resources, and protect public safety. Less restrictive measures, such as designating specific areas where these activities may occur, will not suffice because these activities have the potential to result in unacceptable impacts wherever they occur. These prohibited activities are no longer judged to be appropriate park uses.

Superintendent Signature



11/21/2014